



News Release

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DES STATEMENT REGARDING TEENS FROM COLORADO CITY

PHOENIX – (February 17, 2004) On Sunday, February 16, 2004, Child Protective Services staff learned that two teenage girls from Colorado City who had been in the care and custody of CPS reportedly had run away from their out-of-home placement some time between that day and the previous Friday, February 14.

A police investigation is underway. CPS continues its own search for the two teenagers and is cooperating with the police investigation. In addition, a pick-up order has been issued informing law enforcement personnel that officials in Arizona are searching for the teenagers. CPS hopes to have the teenagers back in its care soon and to continue working to keep them safe.

Earlier today, statements were made alleging that the children ran away from their placement because they feared CPS was going to return them to their families and because they believed CPS had removed their support system.

The statement that CPS was going to return the teenagers to their parents is incorrect. CPS is mandated by federal law to make reasonable efforts within a 12-month period to engage the family in services that could remedy the reasons for the child being placed out of the home. CPS is also permitted, however, to conduct concurrent case planning. The agency can pursue two different case plans simultaneously. In a case like this one, the agency may consider the potential for reunification at the same time as pursuing permanent guardianship or independent living case plans if reunification proves to be not in the child's best interests. As in all dependency cases, CPS must follow a statutorily defined process. The court must approve the permanent case plan, which will not include family reunification if services have not eliminated the risks to the child's safety that resulted in the out of home placement.

The statement that CPS removed the teenagers' support system also is incorrect. The Maricopa County Superior Court issued a "no contact order" in response to a motion made by an attorney representing one teenager's father based on the father's concerns about Ms. Flora Jessop's continued involvement with the children. As in all cases of dependency, the teenager was represented by an attorney, and the Court appointed a Guardian ad litem (GAL) to assert the teenager's best interests in the proceeding. The Court ordered no other change in the teenagers' circumstances that would impact their ongoing support system or advocacy.